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Re-conceptualising political landscapes after the material turn: a typology of material events

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ABSTRACT

This paper conceptualises and categorises the various relationships between materiality, discursive construction of landscapes and collective action. Building on both post-structuralist and non-representational geography, and incorporating insights from social systems theory and from evolutionary governance theory, we present a perspective on materiality as shaping landscapes, communities and cultures through different pathways. These pathways might involve the construction of landscape concepts and can potentially affect collective choice in political landscapes of actors and institutions. Five types of material events are distinguished: silent, whispering, vigorous, fading and deadly events. These events constitute the spectrum in which materiality and changes in materiality affect communication and action. Such conceptualisation and categorisations help to avoid setting up a harsh distinction between matter and discourse, or a simple choice for one over the other as ontologically prior.

KEYWORDS

Material turn; more-than human geographies; landscapes; events; evolutionary governance theory; new materialism

Introduction

The concept of landscape has travelled and changed for thousands of years, in everyday language, in disciplines like geography, philosophy, art history and anthropology (Minca, 2013). It has been conceptualised as: something being real and 'out there' (Bloemers, Kars, & Valk, 2010), a way of seeing (Wylie, 2007), visualisation (Crampton, 2001), practice (Crouch & Parker, 2003), discursive (Barnes & Duncan, 1992; Gailing & Leibenath, 2013), enacted or performed (Gregson & Rose, 2000) and embodied (Whatmore, 2006). In this enduring history of conceptualisations, the materiality of the landscape has, according to some, gradually vanished as a research focus and made space for discourse, text and signs. In the last decade, however, materiality has returned to academic discourses on landscape. Based on the actor-network theories of Latour and others (Latour, 1999, 1992; Law, 2009, 2004; Mol, 2002) and the non- or more-than representational theories within geography and material anthropology (Anderson & Wylie, 2009; Barba Lata & Minca, 2015; Bennett, 2010; Hinchliffe, 2007; Thrift, 2007), landscapes have been conceptualised as relational entities, entanglements of human and non-human elements, that co-constitute each other.

With this article, we aim to contribute to the ongoing reconfirmation of materiality in the understanding of landscapes. We present a conceptual framework for understanding material events, which we conceptualise as any relation between changing materiality and the construction of

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landscapes. This framework takes as its starting point discussions in geography, and attempts to bridge the difference between post-structuralist geographies of landscape (inspired by Foucault and Latour) and material geographies (Thrift, Whatmore, Massey et al., inspired by Deleuze and De Landa). In order to do so, we borrow valuable insights from Niklas Luhmann's theory of social systems, without entirely subscribing to a social systems analysis for the present endeavour (Van Assche, Beunen, & Duineveld, 2014).

Most importantly, we start from a social systems-derived assertion that discourses, as conceptual structures making a part or aspect of reality accessible, distinguish between their material and discursive environments, but can never be certain about the validity of that distinction (Jacobs & Van Assche, 2014). Social systems for Luhmann, as discourses for Foucault and networks for Latour, are self-referential and contingent in the sense that they develop themselves out of their own elements and based on their own emerging logic. Their development, though constrained by this internal logic and 'operational closure', is always contingent, possible but not necessary, and never entirely predictable (Felder, Duineveld, & Van Assche, 2014; Fuchs, 2001).

From the Deleuzian-inspired geographers, we take the insight that materiality and the discursive can be entwined and entangled in radically different ways, and that each form of entanglement embodies its own type of conceptual, perceptual and affective productivity (Thrift, 2007). In Deleuzian terms, one can speak of different 'machines' with a different rhizomatic infrastructure (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Pottage, 1998). Furthermore, actor-network theory (conceptually close to Foucault) considers the social and materiality as mutually constitutive (Felder et al., 2014; Law & Mol, 1995). It is at this general level of mutual understanding between these theorists that we start our conceptual operations and develop our framework.

This framework intends to bridge conceptual differences and to create a new synthesis, and therefore does not fit neatly into any single one of the contributing perspectives; it may be an application of any of them. It furthers our understanding of the dialectical relationship between humans and their environment, for example, as explored in the literature on social-ecological systems. It addresses the complexity of social systems that is often ignored in the more ecological inspired frameworks, while simultaneously bringing back 'nature' to the social sciences (Stone-Jovicich, 2015). The framework we present could also contribute to a better understanding of the possibilities and limits of landscape planning, environmental law and environmental management (cf. Beunen & Van Assche, 2013; Easterly, 2006; Scott, 1998). It is particularly relevant for the range of disciplines that deal with the planning, management and governance of landscapes, such as natural resource management, spatial planning, landscape architecture and environmental policy.

In the following sections, we argue that the relation between materiality and the landscapes emerging and disappearing in the social can be manifold. To do so, we introduce five types of material events: silent, whispering, vigorous, fading and deadly events. These events constitute the spectrum in which materiality relates to the social construction of landscapes and more broadly to the effects of materiality in the social. We use these material events to problematise the manifold relationships between material events and landscapes, while offering additional insights in the way landscapes are understood and governed (cf. Van Assche, Bell, & Teampau, 2012).

Landscapes and material events

Although Foucault does not explicitly conceptualise landscapes, we argue in line with his work that landscapes are moulded through power/knowledge configurations, known through discourses, which link concepts in unique ways and enable unique forms of observation and understanding of materiality (Foucault, 1979). Latour's actor-network theory, borrowing from Foucault, considers in more detail the co-production of reality by discourse and matter, in networks made up of humans, things, ideas and machines, in which machines are seen as the results of previous entanglements of discourse and matter in a particular network structure (Latour, 1999, 2000; Sayes, 2014). Latour, like Foucault, does not talk about landscape directly, but he does touch upon concepts of nature, their emergence and utilisation

in strategies of government control and contestation (Latour, 2004). Deleuzian landscapes on the other hand received much adoring attention in geography, and his materialist ontology led Doreen Massey to the conclusion that, as known by people, landscapes are collections of stories, yet shaped by the meeting of stories with stories and by the continuous moulding of that configuration by the material context of the meeting place (Massey, 2005).

We believe that none of these post-structuralist insights can be dismissed, yet we do not believe that they themselves can come to an agreement regarding the relation between discourse and matter in the emergence and functioning of landscape concepts, and more generally regarding the impact of matter on discourse and on social action. It is here that we believe that new bridging concepts are useful, and that Niklas Luhmann's very precise understanding of matter as known and not known can further our analysis.

Landscapes, social systems and environments

Luhmann's theory revolved around social systems. A social system is a perspective, a form of communication that formulates and follows its own logic, uses its own elements and rules to continuously reproduce itself, and opens up a unique perspective on reality. The relationship between social system and the environment is the most basic distinction for Luhmann (La Cour, 2006; Luhmann, 1995). The environment is everything other than the social system: 'Every system removes itself from its environment. Therefore the environment of each system is different' (Luhmann, 1995, p. 181). The boundaries with an environment are constituted by and within the social system itself. We can assume many different social systems and 'materialities' (human bodies, brains, objects and sounds) to be part of the environment of any social system.

Social systems exist as communications. What is observed and delineated in the environment depends on the inner logic of a social system (e.g. a conversation), its history, and the conceptual distinctions made within it. In other words: social systems are operationally closed (Luhmann, 1995). Because a social system is operationally closed, the relationship between systems and the environment is neither predictable nor deterministic. Determining which aspects of a social system's environment trigger changes in that social system can only be attempted when one has an understanding of the limits and possibilities for a particular social system to observe these changes and to classify them as relevant information for the social system (Luhmann, 2010). The construction of landscapes within a social system is always a contingent product of the social system itself. Contingency refers to the arbitrary and path-dependent nature of these constructions (Van Assche, Beunen, et al., 2014). Yet, materiality matters in these constructions. With the exception of dreams, fictions and visions, landscapes are often observations and delineations of materiality. One can walk, dwell or dig in a landscape and this can change the construction of a landscape in a social system, but it does not necessarily do so (cf. Luhmann, 1989). Some changes will alter the construction of a landscape in a social system, while others do not. Some materialities will change the landscape in one social system and not in others, because they remain unnoticed or because they do not make a difference in that system.

For our present endeavour, a crucial insight emerges out of the combination of several Luhmannian points: a social system (but similarly: a discourse, a network, a rhizome) internally creates images of external material environments, some of these images can be called 'landscapes'. This social system can never go beyond itself and ascertain the ontological status of these environments and their elements. This, combined with the idea that this ontological ambiguity extends to the relation between systems and material environments leads us to the point where we can see that within the social, no way of knowing can be sure about the influence of materiality on itself and on the social organisation it operates in.

This insight in turn is compatible with the Luhmannian idea that no social system can make its own functioning and evolution entirely transparent. It is also compatible with the work of Foucault, Deleuze, or Latour that points to the absence of an Archimedean point from which everything can be observed at the same time; there is no meta-discourse or meta-network which would allow us to fully understand

ourselves in our environment. Such an absent privileged vantage point in all the referred to theories is an expression of the impossibility of complete transparency of the social for the social, including the way it is shaped by its material environment.

What helps is that there are social systems in the environment of systems, discourses beside discourses, opening up the possibility for what Luhmann calls second-order observation (Luhmann, 1993): the observation of the conditions under which different social systems (discourses) observe. This capacity of second-order observation is in other theories referred to with terms as diverse as reflexivity, critical science, cognitive resistance and de-territorialisation. Second-order observation helps us observe how materialities resonate in different social systems and to delineate more or less precisely which materialities have a higher chance of provoking irritations in a social system and which do not (cf. La Cour, 2006).

Silent, whispering, vigorous, fading and deadly events

In the following section, we present and develop a typology of the relationship between materiality and the social. At one extreme, there are absolute silent events: materialities that do not make a difference anywhere, they remain unobserved by any social system and therefore no political landscape—that is, the landscape of actors and institutions in governance and the associated landscape of power and knowledge—is produced that is coupled with these events. At the other extreme, we can imagine deadly events: materialities that cause a halt to a social system and thereby the social system disappears. In this section, we will elaborate on these two extremes and on three events in between.

Silent events

Absolute silent events are those material events that remain unobserved, which makes them non-existent for any social system. They will not lead to discourse or action. Absolute silent events, events that are not observed by any social system, can only be imagined to exist.

Silent events can be real (they take place) but if these events do not turn into communicative events, they will not be connected and connectable to the world as it is known to society. An example could be the collapse of the Roman Empire. Even years after it officially collapsed, some communities living in the periphery of the empire were not aware of the non-existence of the empire and continued to live as if the empire was still present. Silent events can also be recorded unwittingly, by people not understanding what they're seeing, talking about something else, writing something down that finds a reinterpretation later. One can talk about a curse from God, describe symptoms, and later academics analyse these to mean the Plague entered a society. Fish can get stuck in the mud, turn into fossils which can be found and later interpreted as a sign of climate change in a bygone era, leading to new decisions on climate change adaptation in the present.

Absolute silence is harder and harder to imagine, as more and more is being recorded and registered, then later finding an observer—in the media, the police corps, a secret service, or in the lab. Absolute silence is also becoming harder to imagine because an increasing number of social systems, more discourses and more forms of knowledge co-exist. Each of these is equipped with their own set of observational categories, different distinctions which produce new meaning leading to new actions. When bacteria became observable and understandable, viruses were still causing silent events leading to observable events not understandable for humans (cf. Latour, 1988). Water systems and volcanic systems were largely silent until new disciplines emerged, equipped with new modes of observation and distinct conceptual frames.

Events can be silent in one system or discourse, but loud and clear in others. The mode of linkage between them determines if and how the events are shared and spread throughout society. New forms of mathematics can remain silent for a very long time, until they affect physics, which can in turn affect geography, leading to different constructions of objects, subjects and landscapes.

Whispering events

Whispering events occur when materiality is either limiting or enabling the reproduction of social systems, without the social system being aware of this. The environment or materiality can irritate a system or even create a system crisis (Valentinov, 2014), but if the social system adapts to the irritation or crisis, these events may then remain largely unobserved. Whispering events slowly or gradually mould systems, discourses and networks, thus creating a legacy. At the same time, however, they are not 'consciously' observed. They constitute an environment, setting the material limits, or create rigidities for the emergence of new discursive structures.

Whispering events are always in existence and they happen continuously. Many things take place without being recorded consciously by people or by communities, but they still quietly affect social systems. These events are often reflected in culture, as common discourses without explicit references to those events. From a second-order perspective, these reflections become visible. For example: cultures living in a marsh do not only lead to a discourse on water, reed, types of wetlands and fish and birds; there are also a set of adaptations to that marsh landscape which are not reflected upon, and which, until a shock comes, might not be recognised as adaptations to the material. Changes in materiality do not lead to communicative events directly, but leads to patterns of thought and action which fit the landscape, which are compatible with the interwoven material events which constitute the marshland ecosystem.

A different form of whispering is the slow diffusion of observation of a materiality. Certain plants growing somewhere might not be observed for a long time, then by a small group of witches, then by doctors recognising healing power and then by others. Their disappearance much later might not be noticed by anyone except the last witches, then by field biologists, then by a larger group of environmentalists, then by a green political party and by the school system and all the kids there. Such diffusion of observation can be a matter of increasing range, or an increasing audience, but it can also be a matter of travel through coupled discursive and organisational structures: from religion to science, to politics, to education and within science from discipline to discipline. We speak of whispering events when the audience and the set of systems affected is not yet very large and when the observation is not fully articulated; when it is still hidden behind other discourse and action, as in the example of the marshland adaptation.

Vigorous events

Vigorous events happen when material changes in the environment are very unlikely to escape observation and are likely to create significant changes in social systems that have these events as their environment. Their force 'demands' a system to respond. How the system will respond depends on the operations within the social system, on the logic of discourse and the *modus operandi* of the network. If the vigorous events are foreseen, the structure is more likely to respond adaptively. Think for example about a hurricane warning system. If the event is unforeseen, it will present itself as danger. As a consequence, the social system can be shocked and unable to respond in an adequate way (cf. Luhmann, 2002, pp. 22, 31).

Material changes in the environment can be very dramatic, but this does not necessarily correlate to vigorous events in our sense of leading to clear observations, communications and actions. Something can be dramatic and erase many features of an ecosystem, yet be unobserved or not lead to action. For a political theory of material events, the delineation of a category of events which cannot be easily disregarded is more useful. Those events 'exist'. A flood cannot be easily ignored and often leads to action. A volcanic eruption close to a village has the same features. These events are likely to lead to discursive formation. A call to action in politics can follow.

Vigorous events can be shocks, as in the example of the flood and the eruption. They can be vigorous because they pose a real risk for a community, but also for particular modes of thinking and action. The shock can lead to distrust in the realm of collective action (politics), and it can undermine the position of certain ways of understanding the world, in politics and in the community at large. Yet, they do not have to be shocks. Events can also be hard to ignore because they represent an opportunity which

cannot be missed. Gold might have been in the ground, unobserved, but the discovery of gold will trigger a series of events that is hard to stop, except by brute force or extreme silence. The same holds true for oil or gas in more recent times.

The example of risk and opportunity leading to events being vigorous in social worlds already tells us that material and discursive worlds cannot be disentangled. What is risk and opportunity will differ per society and it will hinge on their modes of economic organisation and value systems. If oil is useless, the value will be low and the discovery of oil will not be a vigorous event. The discovery of oil sands in Alberta two centuries ago was not a vigorous event, but a whispering one for a long time, because there was hope the oil would be useful. When oil prices rose and technology progressed, the oil started to 'shout louder', and new discoveries of oil or new outpourings as material events became harder to ignore. Communities create their own landscapes of opportunity and risks, and it is in these landscapes that events become vigorous.

What is vigorous in most circumstances is what can 'kill' easily and can be observed easily. A slow degradation of soil can kill, but can be hard to observe and can remain a whispering event for generations. A failed crop one year can be a vigorous event since it is easily observed and connected to danger. A changing climate can lead to a series of whispering events which are not seen in correlation, and which slowly erode patterns of adaptation and become vigorous. Vikings survived for 600 years in Greenland, but disappeared when they slowly discovered their way of life did not fit the environment anymore.

Fading events

Fading events are material events that were present, but triggered a decrease in communications about them. Fading events can disappear in the environment, but both the process of disappearance and their actual disappearance can remain unnoticed for some time. Fading events are whispering events in reverse.

The same landscapes of risk and opportunity that enable events to become vigorous can also lead to less communication and action. The link with coordinated action in politics can disappear first, then individual action and then communication. That seemingly natural pathway is not the only one. Politics is slower than society and anchored in institutions that provide stability, but that also evolve slower than the rest of society. Old ways of thinking can be embedded in laws, policies and procedures, so events can be fading from communication, but kept alive in action through embedding in institutions (Czarniawska-Joerges, 2008). In a similar fashion, these events can be kept alive in religious rituals mostly separate from other realms of action and communication. In both cases vigour is lost. A dead language can be maintained in church, can recount old events and can lead to ritual actions, but will less likely influence new observations and collective action.

Events can fade when the couplings between social systems become weaker, more disconnected, or more specialised. Religion was more directly linked to politics in the middle ages, while science was weaker, so material events with a religious interpretation could have quick political repercussions. In current times, scientists would give an explanation on TV and religious interpretations would be marginalised by the presence of science and by the buffers built between politics and religion.

Events can fade when they become less reflected upon and less observable over time. To speak of truly fading events, we would add that the whisper has to be on the way, that it has to be possible to point to a process of diminishing observation, decreasing directness of influence of the event on discursive formation and practice. Fading can then be connected to a loss of local knowledge, a loss of academic expertise, a loss of interest, which in turn can be linked to changing values in a community and changing forms of economic and political organisation. Indeed, as Foucault noticed long ago, every change in power/knowledge configuration leads to new observations, to new forgetting and new blind spots (Foucault, 1994; Van Assche, Duineveld, & Beunen, 2014). The old power/knowledge configuration that forged links between material events, communicative events, individual and collective action, will, after disappearance, make the chain unravel. Events fade away, others become vigorous and some become immediately silent.

Deadly events

Deadly events in their purest form can only be imagined, since their actualisation (the destruction of all observers) will not leave room to observe them. By the destruction of a discursive structure, the landscapes produced in and by it will cease to exist. Pure deadly events that wipe out all observation are by definition never observable, yet they are imaginable: they can be theorised, speculated or fantasised about.

Deadly events share their lack of observation with silent events, but they differ in their effects. They might have been observed initially, but killed the whole class of creatures capable of observing them. Had Vesuvius destroyed the whole Roman Empire, the event would have been more deadly: harder to remember and harder to capture in later discourse.

Deadly events can be announced or simply feared. The actual shock of a deadly event is rarely observed or even reconstructed, but the fear of such shocks is common among many societies. Dystopian scenarios abound in world cultures. Deadly events are conceptualised differently, their causes understood differently in different places (for example, religious apocalypse or human-made environmental catastrophe) and the space for action to prevent them will be delineated differently.

Deadly events can also be understood at a smaller scale. Events do not have to wipe out complete civilisations. A bee colony can be destroyed by events not observed and recounted by neither bees nor humans. It is possible the event led to communication within a bee colony, but neither other bees, nor humans have access to that lost communication and the deadly event cannot be reconstructed. In human history, many smaller ethnic or cultural groups disappeared for reasons not understood. Discerning a cause is hard and reducing it to one event even harder. Deadly does not have to be deadly in a physical sense: groups and their perspective, their memory, their understanding of the world, can disappear when people start to identify differently. Changes in materiality can contribute to this: lifestyles, economies, or migration patterns can all change, when places become more or less accessible, warmer or colder, dryer or wetter, or inhabited by different creatures.

In general, we can state now that our categories are not rigid in the sense that one event, slow or fast, only fits one category. The categories reveal themselves to be features of processes of material impact on the social. One process can have several features. Our analysis also reveals that ontology and epistemology, as expected by Luhmann and by the post-structuralists, relate differently in different processes. What is 'real' and what is known entangle differently, and this is exactly why the types of events deserve to be distinguished. Things can happen without entering the social, including the construction of landscape concepts and policies, but things can also not happen and still exert influence. For a social system, the material environment and other social systems are both environments that become blurred in acts of observation and communication. In our emerging perspective, leaning on both social systems theory and post-structuralist geography, that blurring can be disentangled by means of categories of events.

Material events and the political landscape

What can we say about the consequences of these events for the enactment of political landscapes in social systems? Silent events have no political repercussions. What is not observed, and has no communicative effects, does not lead to coordination of action or to collectively binding decisions. Whispering events can have important repercussions in politics. They can alter the political landscape. As argued, the loudness of the whisper and the directness of the link with other forms of communication do not need to be correlated to the scope and intensity of political action. An almost silent event can be observed, but suddenly because of political shifts, create a panic. An invisible link between changing water quality and changing fish populations can lead to drastic action when the 'useful' fish are gone. In other words, the original material event leading to a chain of other observations and actions can be forgotten or not observed, but still lead to an observation which provokes strong political action.

A new mode of (second-order) observation entering politics can give a whispering event a new lease of life. Scientific observation or a particular discipline can suddenly enter the political arena via a popular movement, or a party or a new role in a bureaucracy.

We introduce here the double configuration of actor/institution and power/knowledge, borrowed from evolutionary governance theory (Van Assche, Beunen, et al., 2014). Actors and institutions co-evolve, as do power and knowledge. It is this complex co-evolution that marks a governance path, and it is the understanding of the particular features of a governance path that can inform us about the actual and potential role of different types of knowledge in politics. Old materialities can lead to new landscape concepts or to other concepts implying a response to materiality; whether they lead to collective action, or to policies affecting landscapes, hinges on the governance path. A new party can dominate a new informal actor or a new coalition where common ground has to be found, leading to a new search for and scrutiny of almost-forgotten events and realities. Coalitions lead to new interpretations of realities, and with political shifts in general, new realities are produced, and others are allowed to enter politics. These realities are likely to trigger new confrontations with existing realities in governance, and in society at large. A green movement entering politics will bring in new facts which can be disputed in some cases, but which can also be experienced as giving a voice to a whisper.

What is vigorous is by definition political. Vigorous events enter politics more directly than others. They are less easily ignored, less easily manipulated than the others, yet their use in politics can have more drastic effects, as the events themselves can have more drastic effects. A flood is less easily ignored than progressive pollution of soil. The discourse and action relating to the flood can have more effect, because event and response will likely be dramatic and are accepted to be dramatic by a citizenry, which will otherwise be more cynical. In other words: representation of something as vigorous in politics will contribute to the quality of vigour: politics makes events more or less vigorous. This will be linked not only to the landscape of economic risks and opportunities mentioned before, but also to the landscape of political risks and opportunities. If a flood control measure is beneficial for a position of power, that position will argue for such a measure, and will present the flood as vigorous, requiring drastic response, but not so drastic as to render collective action meaningless (Flyvbjerg, 1998; Van Assche, Duineveld, et al., 2014).

Tragedy is only useful in politics when it can be presented as subject to mitigation and prevention in the future. Deadly events, therefore, can be useful in the political imagination and system. Shocks to the governance system and society as such can and will become part of political games in their anticipation, because fear is a prime political weapon. Deadly events in the past are reinterpreted continuously by evolving science, but also in an ever-evolving political landscape. What can the fall of the Roman Empire tell us about immigration policies now? About land degradation? Property rights? Or about the value of democracy as a more adaptive form of governance? The answers will differ according to time and place, or political ideology embraced. Former deadly events can thus be resurrected in a new context, without their deadly effects and they can lead to political changes in that new context.

Conclusion

The material turn in geography, anthropology and related fields, contributed many new insights to the world of post-structuralism, but with the new materialism one should avoid throwing away the findings of post-structuralism, and of constructivism in general. Understanding the relations between materiality and the social in terms of types of materialities affecting social systems via different pathways and via different couplings, offers a productive shift in perspective that can help to grasp selective presence and absence of materialities in the discursive (including the political) world.

Understanding the relations between materiality and the social also helps to discern the limits of observing, understanding and moulding materiality by means of decisions taken that constitute political landscapes (Duineveld, Van Assche, & Beunen, 2013). In one sense, the construction of reality can never escape the political as it is always embedded in knowledge/power configurations. Therefore when we use the concept of landscape, the political is nested in this definition (Van Assche, Beunen, et al., 2014). Political landscapes now emerge as the configurations of politics, of the social system of politics, not restricted to governmental actors, but including all actors and institutions affecting governance. Materiality affects political landscapes in pathways underpinned by couplings between social systems.

The pattern of pathways affects the categories of material events entering politics, and vice versa. Materiality can and will affect discourse, action and coordinated action in politics, yet the pathways of influence and chains of linkages are complex and manifold. Our categories of material events serve to illustrate this complexity, as real differences in discursive and political effects of material events.

We have conceptualised landscapes, including political landscapes, as emerging and evolving within social systems (or a discourse, a network, a rhizome). These structures are not immune from material forces, but the way materiality matters is more complicated and manifold than some of the new materialists would like us to imagine. Landscapes are by definition constructed within the social. The range of possible relations between social systems and material events is therefore potentially unlimited. Silent, whispering, vigorous, fading and deadly events are introduced here as categories that could provide a structure towards more detailed analyses of these relationships. These five categories of events are useful, we believe, to render more complex the image of a world consisting either of discourse or of matter, one of them leading to action.

Luhmann brought us the essential insight that discursive structures cannot know how materiality is affecting the social; concepts of 'landscape' are products of communication within the realm of the social. He, along with Deleuze, acknowledged that discursive and material elements can co-produce reality. Indeed, all the theorists entertained in our reasoning start from a semiotic construction of the social, from a contingent construction of our image of the material, and a contingent recognition of the impact of the material. The different post-structuralists differ among each other regarding the impact of materiality on this process. Starting from the Luhmannian idea of a potentially different entangling of material and discursive in different empirical situations, we developed our typology of whispering, silent, vigorous and deadly events as part of an ongoing endeavour to bridge materialism and idealism in the geography of landscape, a typology which can accommodate such different entanglements per type and which, we believe, can contribute to the resolution of unnecessarily harsh oppositions in theory building, and at some point, we hope, in policy.

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